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ABSTRACT

A 4-year longitudinal study of 37 hearing impaired children who were graduates of a public school preschool program and were integrated at kindergarten or first grade has identified critical variables in successful integration. Six factors essential to successful psychological integration include early identification and amplification, and stimulating, supportive home environments. Early integration into a neighborhood nursery school is desirable and may be enhanced by staff workshops and use of the receiving school's curriculum. (LS)

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Position Paper
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The identification of the critical variables that will assure successful integration of hearing impaired children in regular classrooms is central to the longitudinal research project that I have been involved with for the past four years.

The data appears to indicate that there are six factors that are crucial if physical integration is to be accompanied by psychological integration.

1. early identification, amplification; intact neurological functioning; and early educational intervention in a preschool program whose primary emphasis is upon developing listening skills and parent participation.
2. stimulating and supportive home environments.
3. functional language skills to communicate with family, peers and other significant adults.
4. early integration into a neighborhood nursery school.
5. understanding the social mores of the peer group.
6. appropriate support services based on the individual needs of the child upon assimilation into the regular classroom.

The audiogram does not appear to be a determining factor for placement in regular classrooms. Of the 37 hearing impaired children studied over a four year period, 29 of them had severe to profound losses. Results from the sociometric data revealed that the 11 severe to profoundly deaf children who comprised the longitudinal sample received a degree of social acceptance commeasurate with that of their normally hearing classmates and were as perceptive of their own social status as their peers.

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Cross sectional data acquired in 1974 indicated that there was no significant differences on academic measures except for word knowledge when the 11 longitudinal subjects were tested with randomly selected same sex classmates. A teacher questionnaire in the fourth year (1972) of the study revealed that with supportive help all of the longitudinal subjects were functioning academically at age/grade level.

All of the 37 hearing impaired children studied at various times during the four year research project are graduates of a public school family oriented preschool program and were integrated at kindergarten or first grade. They were all full time hearing aid users, scored within average limits or above on both the verbal and non-verbal sections of the Merrill Palmer Scale of Mental Tests, and had attended a neighborhood nursery at least one year before integration.

Since the neighborhood nursery school experience is one of the salient characteristics of the 37 hearing impaired children involved in the research study, it seems appropriate to elaborate on this factor. Not only did it help prepare the hearing impaired subjects for future integration, but it also provided the opportunity to facilitate positive societal response to these handicapped children by their teachers, normally hearing peers and other adults. The development of positive attitudes by nonhandicapped individuals for the handicapped child is the key to successful mainstreaming according to Edwin Martin, Deputy Commissioner for the Education of the Handicapped.

One method to encourage a positive nursery school experience for both the hearing impaired child and the staff is to offer a workshop as part of the

integration procedure. This orientation might include a discussion of the care and use of hearing aids; behavior that might indicate an improperly functioning aid; how to model language; how to communicate with the child on a one to one basis; how to encourage acceptable behavior; and the importance of providing parents ahead of time the books that will be read at story time, the words to songs and action plays and unit concepts. There also should be an opportunity to discuss the particular child enrolled in each nursery with the case manager or special education teacher.

Goals should be written jointly by the two staffs. Broad goals might specify that nursery integration will:

1. provide the opportunity for the hearing impaired child to interact socially with normally hearing peers and adults.
2. provide the opportunity for the hearing impaired child to process and imitate peer language and to use his own spontaneous language.
3. provide the opportunity to follow a routine.
4. provide the opportunity for learning appropriate group and social behavior from peer models.

Frequent observations at the nursery school by the special education teacher should include time for asking and answering questions, demonstration teaching, and for promoting a comfortable relationship between the two staffs.

Since research should have practical implications besides providing the impetus for future research, the preschool program the 37 children attended before integration into regular elementary classes has been expanded. A readiness for kindergarten nursery using the receiving school's curriculum is now a component of the program. This option for those children who are candidates for integration at age 5 is in addition to the neighborhood nursery

experience and individual sessions.

Ongoing evaluation of the preschool program and its graduates indicates the need for further research. The functional language skills of 42 hearing impaired integrated children will be examined this year. The data should support the construct that competency in language used in social situations is a dependent variable for successful integration of hearing impaired children.